

# **I Early Childhood Education**

**Strategy I: Facilitate cooperative agreements and partnerships between Tribal Governments, Tribal Education Departments, American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) Education Committee members, and the AI/AN Early Childhood Specialist and Liaisons, in supporting and sustaining a strong commitment to early childhood education.**

**Goal:** Tribal Governments, Tribal Education Departments, and Native American communities will make early childhood education a high priority and become actively involved in the legislative process.

**Objective:** (1) Promote open and continuous communication among Tribal Government members, Tribal Education departments, AI/AN Members, Title VII Coordinators, and Local AI/AN Early Childhood Liaisons. (2) Provide information and resources for Tribal Governments, and Tribal Education Departments on early childhood issues. (3) Tribal Governments and Tribal Education departments will be knowledgeable and advocate for early childhood issues in the legislative process.

## **Action Steps:**

- Identify funding sources to pay for a Local AI/AN Early Childhood Liaison for each tribe. This paid position will be appointed by the tribe or utilize existing tribal leaders and will provide ongoing reporting to the Tribal Government and Tribal Education Departments to keep them apprised of early childhood issues.
- Coordinate regular and ongoing meetings between Tribal Governments, Tribal Education Departments, the appointed Local Tribal Early Childhood Liaison, and AI/AN Early Childhood Committee Members to discuss early childhood issues emphasizing the importance of language acquisition, culture, and child development.
- Identify and collaborate with existing early childhood legislative advocacy groups such as Utah Children, Child Care Coalition, etc. which will provide information about legislative issues that may affect AI/AN children and families.
- Apprise Tribal Governments and Tribal Education departments of legislative initiatives that may affect AI/AN children and families so they may respond and advocate for their children, families, and tribal interests in a timely manner.

**Strategy II: Appoint an AI/AN State Early Childhood Specialist at the Utah State Office of Education to advocate and promote representation of American Indians and Alaskan Natives= needs and rights on state and local early childhood councils, committees, and boards and local education agencies.**

**Goal:** American Indian/Alaskan native interests will be represented on state and local early childhood councils, committees, and boards by a full time AI/AN State Early Childhood Specialist employed by the Utah State Office of Education.

**Objective:** The AI/AN Early Childhood Specialist will provide much needed representation and advocacy efforts statewide.

**Action Steps:**

- Establish a permanent, full-time AI/AN State Early Childhood Specialist Position at the Utah State Office of Education.
- Identify existing early childhood councils, committees, and boards that currently do not have AI/AN representation and request membership.
- AI/AN State Early Childhood Specialist will educate the greater early childhood community on the unique needs of AI/AN children and families.
- The AI/AN State Early Childhood Specialist will coordinate professional development opportunities for early childhood teachers/professionals and administrators that are culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate for AI/AN children.
- The AI/AN State Early Childhood Specialist will work collaboratively with existing early childhood programs such as Early Reading First Programs, Head Start, Early Head Start, Even Start, Child Care Resource and Referral, etc. to expand and improve services to AI/AN children and families
- The AI/AN State Early Childhood Specialist will seek funding opportunities such as grants and initiatives that will benefit AI/AN children and families.
- The AI/AN State Early Childhood Specialist will meet frequently with the Local AI/AN Early Childhood Liaison to exchange information and develop and implement a strategic plan for statewide, high quality early childhood programming.
- The AI/AN State Early Childhood Specialist will work collaboratively with the Special Education community to ensure that AI/AN children are receiving special education services where appropriate.
- The AI/AN State Early Childhood Specialist will work with the early childhood community in establishing the inclusion of standards that are culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate for AI/AN children.
- The AI/AN State Early Childhood Specialist will work with institutes of higher education early childhood teacher preparation programs to ensure all pre-service teachers receive comprehensive training on working within a multicultural setting that supports and challenges students from diverse cultures.
- The AI/AN State Early Childhood Specialist will work with the Utah State Office of Education to ensure that state accreditation standards include linguistic and cultural criteria that support AI/AN children.

- The AI/AN State Early Childhood Specialist, under the guidance of the AI/AN Education Advisory Committee, will educate and inform the State School Board and local education agencies on early childhood issues that affect AI/AN children and families.

**Strategy III: Prepare American Indian/Alaskan Native children for future educational success by providing high quality early childhood educational experiences that are culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate.**

**Goal:** Every AI/AN child will enter school physically, emotionally, and academically ready to learn.

**Objective:** (1) Identify and/or establish health screenings for young children ages 0-5 so they will be physically healthy and ready to enter school. (2) Promote family-community-school partnerships that support families in their efforts to help prepare their young children, ages 0-5, for future success in school. (3) Identify and seek funding sources to expand high quality early childhood services.

**Action Steps:**

- Help tribes establish culturally based local health programs that promote healthy lifestyles and combat substance abuse, poor nutrition, dental decay and other health related issues.
- Encourage family and community participation in comprehensive preschool and home activities that support the families as the child's first and most important teacher.
- Encourage family and community participation in comprehensive preschool and home activities that support the child's native language and culture and prepares him or her for school and learning.
- Plan and implement ongoing school readiness training/activities for children ages 0-5 and their families to be conducted by the Tribal Education departments, Local AI/AN Early Childhood Liaisons, and local early childhood programs.
- Initiate cooperative agreements and partnerships with individuals/agencies providing adult education opportunities so that ongoing learning benefits the entire family.
- Create an infrastructure so that screening procedures are in place for early detection of exceptional learners.
- Train local early childhood professionals such as childcare providers, preschool teachers, home care providers, etc. on culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate literacy and numeracy activities.

- Encourage Tribes and Tribal Education departments to provide training for American Indian/Alaska Native parents, extended families, and communities to promote values and beliefs that will build and strengthen children=s self-esteem, pride, and an Indian orientation toward academics and learning.
- Create opportunities for Tribal Elders to teach tradition, culture, storytelling and Native Languages to AI/AN preschoolers.
- Apply for increased funding for Indian Head Start Programs, Home Visiting Programs, and other high quality childhood programs.
- Research and address barriers to accessing high quality early childhood programs in rural areas.
- Provide tribes with better equipment, buildings, and needed facilities for preschool programs.
- Promote and facilitate communication and involvement between AI/AN families and school personnel.
- Identify resources for AI/AN families in their community.
- Identify and promote a seamless system which advocates for and supports AI/AN children and their families in times of need or crisis.